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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009

#### In Today's Papers

##### Palestinian President Abbas Visits Ankara

Media outlets reported over the weekend that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan in Ankara to discuss regional issues, including divisions among Palestinian factions and regional efforts toward a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. According to papers, Turkish officials told Abbas the rivalry between Palestinian factions should end. Mainstream Vatan says Ankara "urged Abbas to set up a new platform within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to ensure that both Fatah and Hamas can participate." In response, Abbas rejected suggestions for the formulation of an alternative to the PLO and Abbas said Hamas had to accept the authority of the PLO. Prime Minister Erdogan reportedly told Abbas that the Hamas-Fatah divisions harm Turkey's mediation efforts in the region. Islamist-oriented Zaman reported Sunday that Abbas "asked Turkey to back the Egyptian efforts for a settlement between the Palestinian groups, and to declare a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel." Papers comment that by doing so, Abbas made it clear that only Egypt's ceasefire plan is acceptable for resolving the situation in Gaza.

##### Turkey Tries to Persuade Hamas to Free Israeli Soldier

Weekend papers report Turkey is working for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who is currently being held by Hamas. Papers reported on Saturday that a Turkish delegation from the interior ministry and the intelligence service went to Damascus to persuade Hamas to release Shalit. If the initial contacts of the delegation produce positive results, Prime Minister Erdogan's foreign policy advisor Professor Ahmet Davutoglu will travel to Damascus to meet Hamas leader Khaled Meshal. Sunday's Vatan reports, "Hamas demands Israel release 1400 prisoners in exchange for Shalit, but Israel says only 200 militants will be released. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Monday that al-Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti is among the 200 prisoners Israel plans to release in exchange for Shalit."

##### Editorial Commentary on Turkey/Palestine-Israel

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "President Abbas noted that President Gul emphasizes the Turkish public's support for

the Palestinian people as a whole, and not a particular group (i.e. Hamas). It seems an interim government of technocrats in Palestine could pave the way for general elections and lead to Palestinian reconciliation. This formula was first outlined by Abbas and Turkey is also moving closer to siding with this formula."

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The new game plan in the Middle East does not include Turkey. Whether we like it or not, Ankara is not considered a central player amid the new balances in the Middle East. Prime Minister Erdogan has shown that he has no power to break the strong ties between Turkey and Israel. In other words, Turkish diplomacy is now trying to make up for Prime Minister Erdogan's damaging attitude, particularly in the wake of the Davos crisis."

Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in Islamist oriented Zaman: "The outcome of the upcoming elections in Israel will indicate the future direction of the peace process. However given the rise of the hawks in Israeli politics and the likelihood of a Likud victory, hope for peace in the Middle East will remain on the backburner for some time."

Ferai Tinc wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "President Abbas looks forward to seeing Turkey participate in the peace process led by Egypt. Even though he gave friendly and optimistic messages during his contacts in Ankara, Abbas also gave diplomatically crafted messages in order to pull Turkey toward a more balanced approach to the Palestinian issue."

#### FM Babacan Meets with Armenian and U.S. Officials at The Munich Security Conference

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Weekend papers report that Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan met with Armenian President Sarksyan and Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian during the 45th Munich Security Conference. Babacan told reporters "there were productive talks that aimed at normalizing relations between Turkey and Armenia." Today's mainstreams Sabah and Milliyet, along with Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, report FM Babacan held his first contacts with the Obama Administration during the security meeting in Munich. Milliyet reports that Babacan met with U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden on Saturday and with U.S. National Security Advisor General James Jones and U.S. envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, yesterday. Following his meeting with Biden, Babacan said "during our meeting I realized that we have a very intense common foreign policy. I believe that both countries should be in close cooperation on these issues." Responding to a question regarding additional military aid to Afghanistan, Babacan said "Afghanistan was not on our agenda."

#### Despite New Tone of U.S. Foreign Policy, Concern for Afghanistan Dominates Munich Security Conference

Media outlets note the NATO Security Conference in Munich addressed the Obama Administration's new approach to diplomacy, concerns over the situation in Afghanistan, and relations between Russia and both the EU and the U.S. Liberal Radikal headlines, "Don't Become Obama's Vietnam," and reports the Munich Security Conference concluded amid worry about Afghanistan, as "commanders were unable to state a military plan or give an answer to the question 'What is the endgame?' in Afghanistan." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "Unhopeful Messages for Afghanistan," and reports, "the 45th Security Conference came to an end with pessimistic messages for Afghanistan and NATO's inability to effectively defeat the Taliban." Meanwhile, Islamist-oriented Zaman notes Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told reporters Ankara's view of the situation in Afghanistan, "There cannot be only a military solution to Afghanistan, sending more money and sending more soldiers will not solve the problem. Instead, social and political instruments must be used in order to be more effective," as "it's necessary that all groups take part in the democratization process." In a related story, Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports, "Babacan told representatives of the new U.S. administration that Turkey supports the new American foreign policy that is based on dialogue."

#### Baykal to Open CHP Office in Brussels

Media outlets report opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal will travel to Belgium on February 9-10 to participate in the opening of the

CHP's EU office in Brussels. Baykal will meet with EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso; he will also address the European Policy Center on Turkey-EU relations. Baykal will also attend the opening of the Friends of Turkey Group in the European Parliament, which is led by the British Labor Party.

A&G Survey on Efforts to Gain Votes Prior to Local Elections Next Month

Milliyet reports that A&G polling company conducted a poll in 33 provinces with 2407 people. According to the poll results, 52.6 percent believed that the CHP reached out to women in full Islamic dress in order to attract more votes; 6.1 percent of those polled supported the efforts while 15.3 percent said the CHP was mistaken in this approach. 46.9 percent did not find the AKP's efforts toward Alevis sincere, while 23.8 percent said it was a positive approach even though it was only to get votes for the elections; 16.9 percent completely supported the AKP's approach to the Alevi community. 39.9 percent supported the TRT-6 Kurdish broadcast, while 46.4 percent were against it. Moreover, 53.2 percent of DTP voters said the TRT-6 broadcast was not a sincere effort.

TV News (CNN Turk) Domestic News

- Despite heated criticism coming from the press and opposition

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parties, the Tunceli Governor's Office continues to distribute household goods and appliances to poor families in rural areas.

- On Tuesday, the Turkish Parliament will discuss a government plan to deploy warships as part of the international force to police the Somalia coast against pirates.

- Selim Kuneralp, head of the Turkish delegation at the Nabucco talks in Hungary, says he expects the signing of the Nabucco contract by mid-2009.

- Professor Nouriel Roubini of the Stern Business School at New York University says the global crisis will not have a big impact on Turkey.

International News

- President Gul will pay a state visit to Moscow from February 12-15 to discuss customs problems and energy issues. On February 14, Gul will visit Kazan, the capital of Tartarstan.

- A recent public opinion poll suggests support for the Labor Party in Britain drops to its lowest level since Gordon Brown's bank bail-out in autumn.

- Muhammad Khatami announces he will run for re-election as president of Iran after four years.

- The people of Switzerland vote to continue allowing in workers from the EU and to extend access to two new member states, Romania and Bulgaria.

JEFFREY